

KICKBOARD WITH DRAG INDUCING CHANNEL

Technical Field

[0001] The invention relates to kickboards. Particular 5 embodiments of the invention are used by swimmers to train their legs and to improve the strength and power of their kicking stroke.

Background

[0002] In training swimmers, particularly competitive swimmers, it 10 has been recognized that the development of the muscles used in swimming ranks in importance with the swimmer's technique and cardiovascular conditioning. One method of developing the muscles used in swimming involves increasing the weight that the swimmer transports through the water and/or the resistance to the forward 15 movement of the swimmer through the water when the swimmer is performing training laps. Resistance to the forward movement of a swimmer through the water is often referred to as drag. Increasing the drag experienced by a swimmer performing training laps strengthens the muscles used for swimming and reinforces the muscle movements used 20 in swimming, thereby increasing the swimmers's endurance and power.

[0003] There are various techniques for increasing the drag experienced by a swimmer. Some of these techniques are disclosed in:

- United States Patent No. 3,945,068 to Carbonero;
- United States Patent No. 4,302,007 to Oprean;
- United States Patent No. 4,406,628 to Rademacher;
- United States Patent No. 4,781,638 to Winters Jr.;
- United States Patent No. 2,536,390 to Pobochenko;
- United States Patent No. 3,517,930 to Jacobsen;
- United States Patent No. 5,011,137 to Murphy;
- United States Patent No. 5,002,268 to Anderson; and
- United States Patent No. 4,074,904 to Arcidiacono.

[0004] A drawback common to many of these and other prior art techniques is that they do not permit the swimmer to isolate and train the muscles used in kicking. Kicking is a vitally important part of competitive swimming. Swimmers obtain much of their overall swimming power and speed from kicking. It is well recognized that isolating and training the muscles used in kicking strengthens the muscles used in kicking and allows the swimmer to concentrate on the muscle movements used in their kicking stroke, thereby increasing the endurance and power of the swimmer's kicking stroke and the swimmer's overall swimming speed.

[0005] The above-mentioned patents to Carbonero, Rademacher, Winters Jr. and Pobochenko disclose devices that the swimmer holds in their hands and/or arms, such that the swimmer may propel themselves by kicking. However, these devices require that the swimmer use different grips on the device to create drag or that the swimmer orient the device at a particular angle to create drag. Such devices have the drawback that they require the swimmer to maintain their arms and/or upper body in particular position(s) to cause the device to create a constant amount of drag. Such particular arm and/or upper body position(s) often do not permit a full kicking stroke and are therefore not conducive to isolating and training the muscles used in kicking. An additional drawback with these types of devices is that there is a tendency for the drag created by the device to vary if the swimmer does not maintain a desired grip or a desired device orientation.

[0006] Accordingly, there is a general desire to provide a drag-creating device for use by a swimmer which allows the swimmer to isolate and train the muscles used in kicking and which ameliorates some of the aforementioned drawbacks with the prior art.

Summary of the Invention

[0007] A first aspect of the invention provides a drag-inducing kickboard apparatus. The apparatus comprises a kickboard and a funnel member disposed below an undersurface of the kickboard. The funnel member defines, either itself or in combination with the undersurface of the kickboard, a channel having one or more front openings for allowing water into the channel and one or more rear openings for allowing water to escape from the channel. The one or more front openings have a total cross-sectional area that is greater than a total cross-sectional area of the one or more rear openings.

[0008] The funnel member may comprise at least one inner surface that is spaced apart from the undersurface of the kickboard to define the channel between the at least one inner surface of the funnel member and the undersurface of the kickboard.

[0009] The funnel member may be sufficiently rigid to maintain a shape of the channel when the funnel member is wet and there is no flow of water through the channel. The funnel member may also be sufficiently rigid to maintain the shape of the channel when there is a flow of water through the channel created by a human swimmer.

[0010] The funnel member and the kickboard may be integrally formed. The funnel member may alternatively be formed separately from the kickboard and subsequently coupled to the kickboard. Each transverse side of the funnel member may comprise one or more flanges which extend along the undersurface of the kickboard. The funnel member may be coupled to the kickboard by one or more fasteners which project through the flanges and into the kickboard. The funnel member may be coupled to the undersurface of the kickboard by adhesive applied between the one or more flanges and the undersurface

of the kickboard. The funnel member may be welded to the undersurface of the kickboard.

[0011] The apparatus may comprise a plurality of funnel members.

5 Each funnel member may comprise at least one corresponding inner surface that is spaced apart from the undersurface to define a corresponding channel between the at least one corresponding inner surface of the funnel member and the undersurface of the kickboard. Each funnel member may be shaped to provide its corresponding

10 channel with one or more front openings for allowing water into the corresponding channel and one or more rear openings for allowing water to escape from the corresponding channel. For each funnel member, the one or more front openings may have a total cross-sectional area that is greater than a total cross-sectional area of the one

15 or more rear openings.

[0012] The apparatus may comprise a plurality of funnel members. Each funnel member may define, either itself or in combination with the undersurface of the kickboard, a corresponding channel having one or

20 more front openings for allowing water into the corresponding channel and one or more rear openings for allowing water to escape from the corresponding channel. For each funnel member, the one or more front openings may have a total cross-sectional area that is greater than a total cross-sectional area of the one or more rear openings.

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[0013] The at least one inner surface of the funnel member may have a curved cross-sectional profile. The channel may have a generally rectangular cross-sectional profile. The channel may have a generally triangular cross-sectional profile.

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[0014] The funnel member may comprise a rear surface located rearward of the one or more front openings. The one or more rear openings may penetrate the rear surface. The cross-sectional area of the channel may be substantially constant between the one or more front 5 openings and the rear surface. The funnel member may comprise a front surface. The one or more front openings may penetrate the front surface.

[0015] The undersurface of the kickboard may be substantially flat. 10 The undersurface of the kickboard may alternatively have a curved profile.

[0016] The cross-sectional area of the channel may decrease monotonically between the one or more front openings and the one or 15 more rear openings.

[0017] The funnel member may be fabricated from one or more of: plastic, foam, rubber and neoprene. The funnel member may comprise a relatively flexible material and a plurality of relatively rigid braces 20 which are coupled to the relatively flexible material. The funnel member may comprise one or more inflatable cells which may be inflated with air.

[0018] The total cross-sectional area of the front openings may be 25 in a range of 3-45 square inches or in a narrower range of 8-24 square inches. The total cross-sectional area of the rear openings may be in a range of 1-20 square inches or in a narrower range of 3-12 square inches.

30 **[0019]** Another aspect of the invention provides a kit for providing a kickboard with increased drag. The kit comprises a funnel member

that is coupleable to a kickboard. When coupled to the kickboard, the funnel member defines, either itself or in combination with an undersurface of the kickboard, a channel having one or more front openings for allowing water into the channel and one or more rear

5 openings for allowing water to escape from the channel. The one or more front openings have a total cross-sectional area that is greater than a total cross-sectional area of the one or more rear openings.

[0020] Another aspect of the invention provides a method for

10 increasing the drag provided by a kickboard. The method comprises: providing a funnel member with at least one inner surface and coupling the funnel member to the kickboard in such a manner that the funnel member, either itself or in combination with an undersurface of the kickboard, defines a channel having one or more front openings for

15 allowing water into the channel and one or more rear openings for allowing water to escape from the channel. The one or more front openings have a total cross-sectional area that is greater than a total cross-sectional area of the one or more rear openings.

20 [0021] Another aspect of the invention provides a method of training swimmers using kickboards equipped with the funnel members described above. The swimmers may train their legs and kicking stroke or may individually train their arms and arm stroke.

25 [0022] Another aspect of the invention provides kickboard apparatus comprising a buoyant kickboard and a means for increasing a drag provided by the kickboard when the kickboard is propelled through water. The means for increasing drag provides at least one channel having a forward facing inlet and at least one outlet located rearward of

30 the inlet.

[0023] Further features and applications of specific embodiments of the invention are described below.

Brief Description of the Drawings

5 **[0024]** In drawings which depict non-limiting embodiments of the invention:

Figure 1 is an isometric view of a kickboard according to one embodiment of the invention;

10 Figure 2 is an bottom plan view of the Figure 1 kickboard;

Figure 3 is a front plan view of the Figure 1 kickboard;

Figure 4 is a rear plan view of the Figure 1 kickboard;

Figure 5 is a side plan view of the Figure 1 kickboard;

Figure 6 is a bottom plan view of a kickboard according to another embodiment of the invention;

15 Figure 7 is a bottom plan view of a kickboard according to another embodiment of the invention;

Figures 8A, 8B and 8C represent front plan views of kickboards according to further embodiments of the invention;

20 Figures 9A and 9B respectively depict bottom plan and front plan views of a kickboard according to yet another embodiment of the invention;

Figures 10A and 10B respectively depict front and side plan views of a kickboard according to another embodiment of the invention;

25 Figure 11 depicts a front plan view of a funnel member according to another embodiment of the invention;

Figure 12 depicts a front plan view of a funnel member according to yet another embodiment of the invention;

30 Figure 13A depicts a top plan view of a funnel member according to another embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 13B depicts a partially sectioned isometric view of a kickboard incorporating the funnel member of Figure 13A.

Detailed Description

5 **[0025]** Throughout the following description, specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the invention. However, the invention may be practiced without these particulars. In other instances, well known elements have not been shown or described in detail to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the 10 invention. Accordingly, the specification and drawings are to be regarded in an illustrative, rather than a restrictive, sense.

15 **[0026]** Some embodiments of this invention relate to a kickboard having one or more funnel members which provide the kickboard with increased drag. In some embodiments, each drag-inducing funnel member is coupled to the kickboard at least when the kickboard is in use to form a channel between an undersurface of the kickboard and an inner surface of the funnel member. In some embodiments, the funnel member is integrally formed with the kickboard to form a channel 20 between the undersurface of the kickboard and the inner surface of the funnel member. In other embodiments, the body of the funnel member defines a channel independently of the kickboard and the funnel member is coupled to the kickboard at least when the kickboard is in use, such that the channel may be positioned under the undersurface of the 25 kickboard. The channel formed by the funnel member has a front opening with a larger cross-sectional area than that of its rear opening.

30 **[0027]** Kickboards are typically used to provide buoyancy for a swimmer's upper body while the swimmer propels him or herself through the water by kicking. Kickboards in accordance with the invention may be used by competitive and recreational swimmers to

train their legs and to improve the strength, speed, technique, power and/or other aspects of the swimmer's kicking stroke. In such applications, a swimmer rests their arms and/or upper body on the kickboard and kicks to propel him or herself forward. The cross-
5 sectional area of the front opening of the channel is larger than the cross-sectional area of the rear opening of the channel. Accordingly, as the kickboard moves through the water, the cross-sectional area through which water enters the channel is larger than the cross-sectional area of the opening through which water exits the channel. As a result, the
10 funnel member creates drag which is experienced by the swimmer as the swimmer kicks to propel him or herself through the water. A kickboard providing such drag facilitates isolation and training of the muscles used in kicking. In an alternative application, kickboards in accordance with the invention may be used by swimmers to individually train their arm
15 strokes by resting one of their arms on the kickboard and stroking with their other arm to propel themselves through the water.

[0028] Preferably, the funnel member is sufficiently rigid to maintain its shape during regular use, such that, for a given speed of
20 forward movement through the water, the drag created by the funnel member is substantially constant.

[0029] A kickboard **10** according to one embodiment of the invention is shown in Figures 1-5. Kickboard **10** is buoyant and has a
25 relatively flat undersurface **12**. Kickboard **10** may, for example, comprise a conventional kickboard made of rigid or semi-rigid foam material. A drag-creating funnel member **14** is coupled to kickboard **10** to form a channel **19** between an inner surface **17** (Figure 3) of funnel member **14** and undersurface **12** of kickboard **10**. Funnel member **14**
30 comprises a pair of flanges **16A**, **16B** located on transverse sides of a curved central portion **22**.

[0030] Funnel member **14** may be coupled to undersurface **12** using fasteners **24**, which project through flanges **16A**, **16B** and into kickboard **10**. Fasteners **24** may generally be any type of permanent or removable fastener, such as staples, rivets and threaded fasteners, for example. In some embodiments, fasteners **24** extend through to a top surface **13** of kickboard **10**. In some embodiments, funnel member **14** is coupled to other parts of kickboard **10** (eg. top surface **13** or edges **15**). In other embodiments, funnel member **14** is coupled to kickboard **10** using tape, glue or some other suitable adhesive. In still other embodiments, funnel member **14** is coupled to kickboard **10** by a suitable welding process. In general, funnel member **14** may be coupled to kickboard **10** using any technique which facilitates the functionality described herein.

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[0031] Central portion **22** of funnel member **14** has a curved cross-sectional profile that is convex in shape, such that its inner surface **17** is spaced apart from undersurface **12** to form channel **19** between inner surface **17** of funnel member **14** and undersurface **12** of kickboard **10**. The shape of central portion **22** provides channel **19** with a front opening **18** that has a cross-sectional area larger than that of its rear opening **20**. In the illustrated embodiment, central portion **22** is also shaped such that the cross-sectional area of channel **19** decreases monotonically from front to rear.

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[0032] In use, a swimmer (not shown) can position his or her arms and/or upper body on the top surface **13** of kickboard **10** and grip kickboard **10** on top surface **13** and/or along one or more of its edges **15**. The swimmer then propels him or herself in a forward direction (i.e. in the general direction indicated by arrow **21**) through the water by kicking. As the swimmer moves forward, water flows into channel

19 through the relatively large cross-sectional area of front opening **18**, through the increasingly smaller cross-sectional area of channel **19** and out from channel **19** through the relatively small cross-sectional area of rear opening **20**. Because of the relative sizes of front opening **18** and 5 rear opening **20**, the water flowing through channel **19** creates drag when the swimmer is moving forward. Accordingly, swimmers using kickboard **10** are forced to kick with increased muscular effort to overcome the drag created by funnel member **14**, thereby isolating and training the muscles used in kicking.

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[0033] As discussed above, the cross-sectional area of front opening **18** is greater than the cross-sectional area of rear opening **20** to provide drag. The amount of drag experienced by a swimmer using kickboard **10** in the manner described above will typically depend on the 15 ratio of the cross-sectional size of front opening **18** to the cross-sectional size of rear opening **20**. In general, if this ratio is larger, the drag will be greater and, conversely, if this ratio is smaller, the drag will be less. In some preferred embodiments, front opening **18** has a cross-sectional area in a range of 3-45 square inches and rear opening **20** has a cross- 20 sectional area in a range of 1-20 square inches. In particularly preferred embodiments, front opening **18** has a cross-sectional area in a range of 8-24 square inches and rear opening **20** has a cross-sectional area in a range of 3-12 square inches.

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[0034] Preferably, funnel member **14** is sufficiently rigid to maintain its shape when it is wet and there is no flow of water through channel **19**. In other words, when kickboard **10** is wet or immersed in water, the weight of the water preferably will not change the shape of funnel member **14**. Funnel member **14** is also preferably sufficiently 30 rigid to maintain its shape during use (i.e. when exposed to the forces that may be applied to funnel member **14** by water during use of

kickboard **10** by a human swimmer). The rigidity of funnel member **14** is advantageous, because, in use, funnel member **14** provides a relatively constant drag for a given speed of forward movement. To avoid injury, however, funnel member **14** is also preferably at least 5 moderately resiliently deformable, such that it may be deformed by a swimmer whose body contacts funnel member **14**.

[0035] In the illustrated embodiment of Figures 1-5, funnel member **14** is fabricated from a material that has the desired rigidity to 10 maintain the shape of funnel member **14** when in use by a human swimmer and the desired resilient deformability to avoid injury. Examples of suitable materials for funnel member **14** and kickboard **10** include, without limitation: plastic (e.g. various forms of polyethylene and polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride, urethane), foam (e.g. ethyl vinyl 15 acetate, polyethylene, polystyrene), rubber, neoprene, wood and various types of fabrics.

[0036] In other embodiments (discussed further below), funnel member **14** is fabricated from a relatively flexible material and one or 20 more relatively rigid braces are coupled to the flexible material. The braces are preferably sufficiently rigid to maintain the shape of funnel member **14** when in use by a human swimmer, but are preferably moderately resiliently deformable to avoid injury.

25 **[0037]** In still other embodiments, funnel member **14** and/or kickboard **10** are fabricated from relatively flexible material which comprises one or more air chambers. Air chambers in funnel member **14** may be inflated with air to provide funnel member **14** with the desired rigidity and deformability characteristics. Air chambers in 30 kickboard **10** may be inflated to provide kickboard **10** with the desired buoyancy characteristics.

[0038]

[0039] Figure 6 depicts the undersurface **112** of a kickboard **110** according to a different embodiment of the invention, wherein kickboard **110** comprises a plurality of funnel members **114**. Funnel members **114** are coupled to undersurface **112** at spaced apart locations using fasteners **124** which project through flanges **116A**, **116B** on transverse sides of funnel members **114**.

[0040] In the illustrated embodiment of Figure 6, each funnel member **114** of kickboard **110** is substantially similar. In other 10 embodiments (not shown), individual funnel members **114** may differ in size, in the characteristics of their cross-sectional profile, in the way that they are coupled to kickboard **110** and/or in other characteristics. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other embodiments of the invention described herein may also incorporate a plurality of funnel members.

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[0041] Figure 7 depicts the undersurface **212** of a kickboard **210** according to a different embodiment of the invention, wherein funnel member **214** is integrally formed with kickboard **210**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other embodiments of the invention described 20 herein may also comprise funnel members that are integrally formed with their associated kickboards.

[0042] The embodiments described above incorporate funnel members which have a generally convex curved profile. In general, the 25 invention should be understood to incorporate funnel members having other cross-sectional profiles. For example, Figure 8A depicts a front plan view of a kickboard **310A** comprising a funnel member **314A** with a rectangular cross-sectional profile and Figure 8B depicts a front plan view of a kickboard **310B** comprising a funnel member **314B** with a 30 triangular cross-sectional profile. Channel **319A** of kickboard **310A** (Figure 8A) is defined by the three inner surfaces **317A**, **317A'**, **317A"**

of funnel member **314A** and by undersurface **312A** of kickboard **310A**. Channel **319B** of kickboard **310B** (Figure 8B) is defined by the two inner surfaces **317B**, **317B'** of funnel member **314B** and by undersurface **312B** of kickboard **310B**.

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[0043] In other alternative embodiments (not shown), funnel members according to the invention have other cross-sectional profiles, provided that the cross-sectional area of the front opening of the channel is greater than cross-sectional area of the rear opening of the channel.

10 For example, a funnel member may be shaped to provide a channel with a rectangular front opening and a curved rear opening, provided that the cross-sectional area of the front opening of the channel is greater than the cross-sectional area of the rear opening of the channel. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other embodiments of the invention 15 described herein may incorporate funnel members having alternative cross-sectional shapes.

[0044] Figure 8C depicts a front plan view of a kickboard **310C** according to another alternative embodiment of the invention.

20 Kickboard **310C** comprises a funnel member **314C** with a rectangular cross-sectional profile comprising inner surfaces **317C**, **317C'**, **317C''**, which, together with undersurface **312C** of kickboard **310C**, define a channel **319C**. The front opening **318C** of channel **319C** is a single opening. However, funnel member **314C** comprises a rear surface 25 **323C** which is penetrated by a plurality of openings **321C**. Accordingly, the rear opening of channel **319C** is made up of a plurality of openings **321C** which penetrate rear surface **323C**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that rear surface **323C** and the rear openings **321** therein need not be located at the rearwardmost extent of funnel member 30 **314C**. In general, rear surface **323C** and the rear openings **321** therein need only be rearward of front opening **320C**.

[0045] Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other funnel member and kickboard embodiments described herein may comprise a plurality of front openings and/or a plurality of rear openings, provided 5 that the total cross-sectional area of the front opening(s) of the channel is greater than the total cross-sectional area of the rear opening(s) of the channel. References in this description and the accompanying claims to the cross-sectional area of the front opening of the channel and the cross-sectional area of the rear opening of the channel should be 10 understood to refer to the total cross-sectional area of all of the front openings and the total cross-sectional area of all of the rear openings.

[0046] Figures 9A and 9B respectively depict bottom and front plan views of a kickboard **410** according to still another embodiment of 15 the invention. The undersurface **412** and top surface **413** of kickboard **410** have curved profiles (i.e. rather than the generally flat profile of kickboard **10**) and the edges **415** of kickboard **410** also have a curved ergonomic profile. In general, kickboards according to the invention may have virtually any shape. Those skilled in the art will appreciate 20 that other embodiments of the invention described herein may incorporate kickboards having curved profiles or other shapes.

[0047] Figures 10A and 10B respectively depict front and side views of a kickboard **510** according to another alternative embodiment 25 of the invention. Funnel member **514** forms a channel **519** between the undersurface **512** of kickboard **510** and inner surfaces **517, 517', 517"**. Channel **519** has a rectangular cross-section that is relatively constant in cross-sectional area between front opening **520** and rear surface **523**. Rear surface **523** extends between inner surfaces **517, 517'** and **517"** 30 and is penetrated by a rear opening **520**. Rear opening **520** has a cross-sectional area which is smaller than that of front opening **518** and

smaller than that of the rest of channel **519**. The difference in the cross-sectional area of front opening **518** and rear opening **520** creates drag as described above. Funnel member **514** may be shaped to provide channel **519** with different cross-sectional shapes as described above.

5 Those skilled in the art will appreciate that rear surface **523** and the rear opening **520** therein need not be located at the rearwardmost extent of funnel member **514**. In general, rear surface **523** and the rear opening **520** therein need only be located rearward of front opening **520**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other embodiments of the invention
10 described herein may comprise a channel with a constant cross-sectional area and a rear surface penetrated by a rear channel opening that is smaller in cross-sectional area than the front channel opening.

[0048] Figure 11 depicts a funnel member **614** according to another alternative embodiment of the invention. Funnel member **614** 15 comprises a bottom surface **617**, a pair of side surfaces **617'**, **617"** and a top surface **650**, which define a channel **619** with a rectangular cross-sectional profile. Channel **619** comprises a front opening **618** and a rear opening **620**. Funnel member **614** differs from the above-described
20 embodiments in that channel **619** is completely defined by funnel member **614** (i.e. channel **619** is defined independently of the kickboard (not shown) to which it may be coupled).

[0049] In the embodiment of Figure 11, top surface **650** of channel 25 **619** abuts against the undersurface of the kickboard to which funnel member **614** may be coupled. Top surface **650** may be used to couple funnel member **614** to the kickboard using fasteners or any of the other techniques described above. In other embodiments, the channel **619** defined by funnel member **614** is spaced apart from the undersurface of
30 the kickboard to which it may be coupled and need not abut against the undersurface of the kickboard. Those skilled in the art will appreciate

that other embodiments of the invention described herein may be configured to incorporate channels that are defined independently of the kickboard to which they may be coupled.

5 [0050] Figure 12 depicts a funnel member **714** according to another alternative embodiment of the invention. Funnel member **714** is similar to funnel member **614** of Figure 11 in that channel **719** is defined by funnel member **714** independently of the kickboard (not shown) to which it may be coupled. However, funnel member **714** also 10 comprises “C-shaped” mounting flanges **756** on its transverse sides. In the illustrated embodiment, each mounting flange **756** comprise a bottom surface **750**, a side surface **752** and a top surface **754**. Funnel member **714** may be mounted to the kickboard with mounting flanges **756** extending around the side edges of the kickboard. Top surfaces **754** 15 may abut against the top surface of the kickboard, side surfaces **752** may abut against the side surfaces of the kickboard, and bottom surface **750** may abut to the bottom surface of the kickboard. Mounting flanges **756** may be coupled to the kickboard using fasteners or any of the other techniques described above.

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[0051] In other embodiments, mounting flanges **756** are made from material that is resiliently deformable, such that the surfaces of mounting flanges **756** are deformed when funnel member **714** is mounted to the kickboard. In this manner, the surfaces of mounting flanges **756** may 25 form a friction fit with the corresponding surfaces of the kickboard. In still other embodiments, mounting flanges **756** are made from material that is resiliently deformable, such that the surfaces of mounting flanges **756** may be compressed against the corresponding surfaces of the kickboard by a person using the kickboard and gripping flanges **756**. 30 Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the other embodiments

described herein may comprise funnel members which are provided with mounting flanges similar to mounting flanges **756**.

[0052] Figure 13A depicts a top plan view of a funnel member **814** according to another embodiment of the invention. Figures 13B is a partial cross-sectional isometric view showing one particular example of how funnel member **814** may be coupled to a kickboard **810**. Funnel member **814** is fabricated from a relatively flexible material **880**, such a neoprene or some type of fabric for example. Funnel member **814** also comprises one or more relatively rigid braces **881** which are coupled to flexible material **880**. The illustrated embodiment of funnel member **814** comprises a pair of transversely extending braces **881A, 881B** which are respectively coupled to the front and back ends of flexible material **880**. In the illustrated embodiment, braces **881A, 881B** are coupled to flexible material by extending through guide tubes **884A, 884B** which are sewn into (or otherwise formed in) flexible material **880**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that there are many other ways to couple braces **881** to flexible material **880** which include the use of fasteners, adhesives, sewing and welding for example.

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[0053] Braces **881** are relatively rigid in comparison to flexible material **880**. However, braces **881** are also preferably moderately resiliently deformable. In the illustrated embodiment, braces **881** are flat in their undeformed state. Accordingly, funnel member **814** is also flat in its undeformed state. As shown in Figure 13B, funnel member **814** is deformed and mounted to kickboard **810** to create a channel **819** between an undersurface **812** of kickboard **810** and an inner surface (not shown) of funnel member **814**. Channel **819** has a front opening **818** and a rear opening **820**. Front opening **818** has a larger cross-sectional area than rear opening **820** to provide drag as discussed above. In other embodiments, braces **881** and funnel member **814** may have different

shapes in their undeformed states. For example, braces **881** and funnel member **814** may have the shape shown in Figure 13B when they are in their undeformed state.

5 [0054] Preferably, braces **881** are sufficiently rigid to maintain the shape of flexible material **880** and funnel member **814** when kickboard **810** is in use by a human swimmer. However, braces **881** are also preferably moderately resiliently deformable to avoid injury if the swimmer's body contacts funnel member **814**. In the illustrated 10 embodiment of Figures 13A and 13B, funnel member **814** comprises a pair of transversely extending braces **881A**, **881B** which are respectively disposed at the front and rear ends of funnel member **814**. In other embodiments, funnel member **814** may comprise different 15 numbers of braces **881**, which may extend transversely and/or in other directions to provide funnel member **814** with desired rigidity and deformability. In particular, funnel member **814** may comprise one or more longitudinally extending braces **881**.

20 [0055] In the illustrated embodiment of Figure 13B, funnel member **814** is coupled to kickboard **10** using fasteners **888**, which are coupled to braces **881** and which extend through kickboard **10**. In some embodiments, the ends of braces **881** are threaded for coupling to 25 fasteners **888**. Funnel member **814** may additionally or alternatively be coupled to kickboard **10** using any of the other techniques described herein.

30 [0056] Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the other embodiments of the invention described herein may comprise funnel members which comprise a relatively flexible material and relatively rigid braces.

[0057] The description provided above in relation to the additional and/or alternative kickboard and funnel member embodiments depicted in Figure 6-13B focusses on the additional and/or alternative features of these embodiments. The kickboards and funnel members of these 5 embodiments may have other characteristics and features which are similar to those of kickboard **10** and funnel member **14** depicted in Figures 1-5. The additional and/or alternative kickboards and funnel member embodiments may also operate in substantially the same manner as kickboard **10** and funnel member **14** to create drag, thereby allowing 10 a swimmer to isolate and train the muscles used in kicking.

[0058] In some embodiments of the invention, one or more funnel members are provided in the form of a kit for retrofitting an existing kickboard. People may couple a suitable funnel member to their 15 kickboard to form a corresponding channel. Kits according to the invention may comprise funnel members having different ratios of the total cross-sectional areas of their front and rear opening(s), such that a swimmer can change the drag that they experience while using their kickboard device by changing the funnel member that is mounted to the 20 kickboard. Funnel members provided in kits may be preformed with a certain shape or may require that the user deform the funnel member to provide a suitable shape.

[0059] As will be apparent to those skilled in the art in the light of the foregoing disclosure, many alterations and modifications are possible in the practice of this invention without departing from the spirit or scope thereof. For example:

- 5 • The shape of the funnel member and/or channel formed by the funnel member need not be smooth or continuous. In some embodiments, the channel may comprise steps or other discontinuities.
- 10 • In general, there is no requirement that the rear opening be at the rear of the funnel member or of the channel. In some embodiments, one or more rear opening(s) may be in the sides of the channel or on the bottom surface of the channel. All that is required, in general, is that the rear opening(s) be rearward of the front opening(s).
- 15 • In any of the embodiments described herein, the kickboard and/or the funnel member and/or parts thereof may be fabricated from a relatively flexible material having one or more air chambers. Air chambers in the funnel member may be inflated with air to provide the funnel member with the desired rigidity and deformability characteristics. Air chambers in the kickboard may be inflated to provide the kickboard with the desired buoyancy characteristics.
- 20 • The funnel member may comprise additional flanges, scoops, foils or the like which extend in transverse directions. Such devices may extend into the channel or outwardly from the funnel member to provide additional drag.
- 25 • The funnel member may comprise a mechanism for opening, closing and/or varying the size of one or more of its front and/or rear openings to vary the drag created by the funnel member. Such a mechanism may comprise an adjustment member that slides transversely over one or more of the front and/or rear

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openings of a funnel member for example. In another example, a cover member may be attached to a funnel member using hook and loop fasteners, a “snap together” mechanism or the like to cover one or more of the front and/or rear openings in a funnel member.

Accordingly, the scope of the invention is to be construed in accordance with the substance defined by the following claims.